McGovern didn't quite convince 'average' voter

By Morton Kondracke
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WASHINGTON — Richard J. Johnson of Rolling Meadows, Ill., selected by national public television as a typical American voter, said Wednesday after five days of travel with Sen. George McGovern that he is "still undecided, leaning toward President Nixon."

Johnson's view of the presidential campaign from the point of view of a self-described "little old voter from the State of Illinois" was broadcast Wednesday on public TV channels around the country, including Channel 11 in Chicago.

A 43-year-old credit manager for the National Steel Service Center in Evanston, a lifelong Democrat and $15,000-a-year suburbanite with two cars, four children and a working wife, Johnson was picked last January to give a Middle American's impression of the campaign.

Watched for 5 days

Then, early this month, Johnson took off five days to travel with McGovern's campaign through California, Texas, Downstate Illinois and Minnesota.

A public television newscaster, Robert MacNeil, said that his network was trying to test the McGovern campaign's assertion that the average voter would be pro-McGovern if he could see the Democratic candidate at close hand.

RICHARD J. JOHNSON

Johnson rode on McGovern's plane, told his wife that his trip was "a bowl of cherries," listened to the candidate bid for workers, farmers' and Jewish votes, heard him recall his days as a minister and student in Diamond Lake, Ill., and even got an opportunity to ask McGovern personally about amnesty and economics.

Still not convinced

Afterward, Johnson said he had "moved toward McGovern" and found that he was "congenial, the way he acted," but said he was still leaning toward the President.

In a telephone interview, Johnson added that he was "not super-heated over Nixon. It's just that he's done a fairly decent job for four years and I'd just as soon see him complete the job."

He said that if Sen. Edward M. Kennedy were the Democratic candidate, he would vote for Kennedy, however.

"I'm just not sure about McGovern. I agree with a lot of what McGovern says and I'm sure he is sincere, but I can't see that he's got enough wherewithal to get his program over.

'Kennedy has pull'

"I don't think McGovern has a dynamic impression. I think Kennedy's got the experience, the pull, if you want to use that word, to get the job done."

Johnson said that he would not hold the Chappaquiddick tragedy against Kennedy because "it's strictly personal" and "we've all made serious mistakes in our lives."

Neither would he hold the Watergate bugging or alleged irregularities in the U.S. wheat deal with Russia against Mr. Nixon. "It's all a lot of politics," said Johnson.

Sobering jesting

KUALA LUMPUR, Malaysia (UPI) — The U.S. Embassy has sent out invitations for a drug-abuse teach-in carrying a cartoon captioned "Drugs are fun: you'll die laughing." Another is captioned "Pot can cook you."